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ABSTRACT

A conversation with the author's 7-year-old son who is just beginning to learn French serves to illustrate the concept of communicative competence and its implications for second-language teaching and testing. Communicative competence is defined as the ability to engage in spontaneous, interpersonal transactions, in contrast to linguistic competence, which is achieved mainly through habit formation. The various errors the young informant makes and possible reasons for them are noted, together with the semantic richness of his French as contrasted with its structural simplicity and the wide range of his comprehension as compared to the level of production. The following conclusions are drawn: (1) Teachers should provide for semantic richness in early stages by giving the student the words he needs, rather than stressing the importance of learning structure first. (2) Grammatical errors should be expected and viewed as the natural consequences of learning. (3) Listening experiences must be stressed. (4) Everything done in the classroom must be done in a meaningful context that involves the feelings and concerns of the students. The author further emphasizes that classroom tests must measure progress toward an ability to successfully engage in spontaneous, creative conversation, not context-devoid points of pronunciation and grammar. (Author/PM)

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TALKING WITH MY SON: AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE*

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As a teacher of French and, what is more, the wife of a native Frenchman, I am frequently asked if my children speak French. "Uh....well," I find myself replying to these understandable queries, "not the girls, but Daniel gets along pretty well even though we very seldom speak French with him at home." The girls (Catherine and Julie, ages 4 and 3), I explain, have not as yet had the opportunity for sustained French listening and speaking. Daniel (age 9), however, began speaking French two years ago when we spent the summer in Dauphiné.

My husband and I decided early in our parenthood not to insist that our children speak French with either one or both of us. Aware of the many ramifications of the bilingual question, we were concerned that the efforts we might make to encourage the use of French might adversely affect the development of English language skills and, subsequently, general academic progress. Even more important, to be honest, was the rebellion we had seen in the children of some of our bilingual-bicultural acquaintances. The attempt to enforce the use of a second language in almost complete isolation of a peer group for whom the language is natural can result in frustration and resentment. Much better, we decided, to have the children love Daddy and take pride in his ethnic distinction, than to impress our friends with the linguistic dexterity of progeny who, underneath, resent everything and everyone French. So, it was not until the occasion of his first sustained residence in France in the summer of 1972 that Daniel, then age 7, began speaking French.

My concern here is not, however, to discuss the for and against of bilingual acquisition, a subject charged with political overtones which, as the French say, "fait couler beaucoup d'encre." My comments thus far have served, rather, to provide an introduction for a conversation which I have chosen to illustrate

ED 090783

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the concept of communicative competence and its implications for second-language teaching and testing. Note that I speak of communicative rather than linguistic competence. There is a growing realization in the profession that linguistic competence - achieved particularly through habit formation - is not the same thing as an ability to engage in spontaneous interpersonal transactions, and that the development of communicative competence is greatly enhanced by the opportunity for creative, spontaneous expression from the very first weeks of second-language study.[1] But old habits (if you will pardon the pun) die hard. We give our assent to theories and data which support language development through trial-and-error language use, yet, while we go along with the trials, we recoil when confronted with the errors. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our testing. We may call for innovation and self-expression in the classroom, but what do we look for when it comes time for the final test of competence? Complete sentences, verb and subject agreement, gender, tense, etc., etc. Oh, if only there were some way to get students to be creative without making mistakes!

What we need, perhaps, is a little of what the Women's Liberation Movement calls "consciousness raising." We need to see "errors" - and from now on I will use the term in quotes - for what they are: an indication not of learning failures but of learning strategies. "Errors" as such are not only inevitable, they are desirable. They offer evidence of language growth through language use, i.e. the exchange of real meaning rather than the parroting of memorized phrases.

The analysis of children's speech in recent years offers important new perspectives on first-language acquisition, showing among other things, the embryonic nature of language development. What to the adult appear as "errors" in a child's speech are, in fact, evidence of the child's insight into how the language works. A nine-year-old who says "*He winded my watch." is demonstrating his grasp of a general rule of past-tense formation (sand - sanded; bat - batted; etc.). He has not yet discovered that wind, like find (but unlike mind), corresponds to wound.

A three-year-old who, in response to the comment, "I was waiting for you.", says "*You was?" shows an understanding of the I - you relationship with verb form constant (I walk - you walk; I saw - you saw; etc.). In both cases there is an overgeneralization of a rule which will be subsequently refined. Parents attest, and research has shown, moreover, that such refinement will occur only when the child is good and ready. Repetition of the correct form (pattern practice, if you will) is of little avail in advancing the schedule of development.[2]

The analysis of children's "errors" to discover more about second-language learning strategies is even more recent. Data is as yet limited, but there is evidence to suggest that many of the productive syntactical "errors" made by children learning a second language are not due to interference from their first language - the assumption underlying the contrastive-analysis approach to second-language teaching. They are indications, rather, of the same kinds of generalizations made by children learning that same language as their first language.[3]

To the extent this proves to be true, it would seem to offer further support for providing the child learning a second language with the same kinds of multifarious opportunities for self-expression that are available to him in his first language. Whatever their provenance, however, be it first language interference or generalizations common to learning the language as a first language, we must learn to accept "errors" in second-language use as a function of second-language acquisition. Not until then will we be ready to evaluate the progress of our students toward the goals both they and we presumably have in mind, namely the ability to exchange ideas with native speakers of French. Increased familiarity with the "errors" (i.e. learning strategies) of children engaged in spontaneous self-expression in a second language should give us a better perspective, moreover, from which to make such evaluations of communicative rather than linguistic competence.

The conversation transcribed below is interesting as an

example of just such communicative competence - rudimentary as it is - and of the contrast it provides to the types of exchanges most often offered as models for beginning second-language learners. It was the first conversation in French I had ever had with my son, and it came about because I was curious when I heard shopkeepers and relatives comment on how well Daniel spoke French. We had been in France for about two months. During that time neither my husband nor I had made any special effort to speak or otherwise teach French to our children. Our foremost concern was that they enjoy their visit. Rightly or not, with so many readjustments in our living patterns and relationships outside the family, we felt it important to maintain at home the English language to which they were accustomed. Daniel did have numerous contacts with French-speaking persons outside our immediate family, however, as is apparent from the content of our conversation. I should add that he agreed to speak French with me on this occasion because he was both intrigued by the idea of talking into a microphone and happy to have a few minutes reprieve from his nine o'clock bedtime.

	Sandra	Daniel
1	Alors, Daniel, on va discuter un peu, si tu veux. Dis-moi comment tu t'appelles.	Daniel.
2	Et quel âge as-tu, Daniel?	Sept.
3	Oui, et est-ce que tu aimes la France?	Oui.
4	Et qu'est-ce que tu fais en France?	Fais mon bicyclette.
5	Ah...tu fais du...tu fais de la bicyclette?	Oui.
6	Est-ce que tu vas très vite?	Oui.
7	Tu vas trop vite peut-être?	Non non.
8	C'est...c'est dangereux?	Um...fais le bicyclette?

9 Oui.	Un tout petit peu.
10 Un tout petit peu?	Oui.
11 Tu n'as jamais eu d'accident? Tu es tombé une fois de ta bicyclette?	Non.
12 Tu n'es jamais tombé?	Non.
13 Non? Est-ce que tu fais bien attention aux voitures?	Uh...tout petit peu.
14 Tu...tu vas doucement quand tu arrives au stop? Tu...tu vas doucement? Tu ne vas pas trop vite?	Non.
15 Bon. Et qu'est-ce que tu fais à bicyclette?	Fais les commissions.
16 Fais les commissions. Où est-ce que tu vas pour faire les commissions?	Viriville.
17 A Viriville.	Oui.
18 Oui. Et qu'est-ce que tu achètes? ....Qu'est-ce que tu achètes? ....Tu comprends?	Non.
19 Bon. Uh...qu'est-ce que tu prends?	Uh...le pain, des pains chocolat, des...um...des... confiture.
20 De la confiture, oui, et quoi d'autre?	Et la bifteck haché...
21 Bifteck haché, oui.	Et c'est tout.
22 C'est tout? Et...tu ne prends pas de pain?	Oui. (<u>with insistence</u>)
23 Oui, du pain. Combien coûte le pain?	Un franc, un franc et ten centimes.
24 Ah bon. Un franc <u>dix</u> centimes.	Dix centimes.
25 Oui, c'est ça. Est-ce que tu passes voir mémé et tatie quand tu vas à Viriville?	Oui, et prends des salades...

26 Ah, tu prends de...	Et les lettres aussi.
27 Et les lettres?	Oui.
28 Oui. Est-ce que tu es content à Viriville?	Oui.
29 Qu'est-ce que tu aimes à Viriville surtout?	Um...sais pas.
30 Qu'est-ce que tu aimes? Il doit y avoir des choses que tu aimes particulièrement. Tu as des copains?	Oui.
31 Qui sont tes copains?	Christian Christian.
32 Christian et Christian, oui. Il y a deux Christian.	Oui.
33 Oui. Qui sont ces deux Christian?	Le pain Christian...
34 Ah, le...le pain Christian. Tu veux dire c'est le fils du...du boulanger.	Oui.
35 Oui.	Et...Christian la...fait la bicyclette (a)vec moi.
36 Ah oui, l'autre Christian qui fait de la bicyclette avec toi. Oui. Il a une soeur je crois, non?	Oui.
37 Comment s'appelle sa soeur?	Uh...Chantal.
38 Chantal, oui.	Et le l'autre Christian aussi... elle s'appelle Chantal.
39 L'autre Christian a une soeur qui s'appelle Chantal, oui. Et dis-moi un peu, qu'est-ce que tu as fait aujourd'hui.	...eh..sais pas.
40 Tu (ne) sais pas?	Non.
41 Qu'est-ce que tu as fait? Quelqu'un est venu manger.	Denise elle vient manger.. manger lapin. Moi pas aime le lapin.

42 Toi tu aimes le lapin?	Pas aime le lapin.
43 Eh, pardon?	Pas aime lapin.
44 Tu n'aimes pas le lapin?	Non.
45 Ah bon. Et qu'est-ce qu'on a mangé d'autre?	...des melons des pâté des olives noires des saucissons des...uh...fromages...et des...Qu'est-ce qu'il y a pour dessert /dizer/?
46 Un dessert? Qu'est-ce qu'il y avait comme dessert?	Sais pas.
47 Tu ne sais pas?	*Qué s'appelle?
48 Ça s'appelle un gâteau.	Gâteau quoi?
49 Mais c'était un...un diplomate.	Diplomate...manger des diplomate...
50 Oui.	Et c'est tout!
51 C'est tout? Qu'est-ce qu'il...	Et le café et le vin.
52 Le vin et le café, puis, à la fin du repas, qu'est-ce qu'il y avait à boire?	Vin (with irritation).
53 Vin, et puis?	De l'eau.
54 De l'eau, et puis autre chose, à la fin. Avec le dessert, qu'est-ce qu'on a bu?	Ah, champ...champagne.
55 Champagne, très bien. Et maintenant je vois que tu es en pyjama. Tu vas te coucher maintenant?	Non.
56 Pourquoi?	Fais encore de ça.
57 Comment?	Fais encore des ...
58 Tu veux faire encore de ça? Tu veux continuer à parler au micro?	Oui.

59	Oui. Mais il se fait tard je crois. Il est neuf heures et demie.	Bon.
60	Bon. Alors, tu vas te coucher?	Oui.
61	Avec qui (est-ce) que tu couches?	Julie.
62	Qui est Julie?	Julie..
63	Qui est-ce?	Savignon
64	Julie Savignon. C'est ta soeur alors?	Oui.
65	Quel âge a-t-elle?	Deux ans.
66	Deux ans. Et tu as une autre soeur aussi?	Oui. Catie..
67	Catie.	Trois ans.
68	Très bien. Et est-ce que tes soeurs sont heureuses en France aussi?	Oui.
69	Oui. Très bien. Alors, au revoir Daniel.	Au revoir.

Merci de cet interview.

One's first impression upon listening to (or, in this case, reading) the above exchange might be either 1) "What a remarkable flowing, relaxed conversation for a little boy who is just beginning to learn French!";or 2) "What ungrammatical French!" Both are true. Using the most common measures of linguistic competence, Daniel's French would not score very high. Let us suppose for a moment that this is a testing interview situation and compare Daniel's first few remarks with what might be considered "acceptable" responses:

1) Daniel
Je m'appelle Daniel.

2) Sept.
J'ai sept ans.

3) Oui.
Oui, j'aime la France.

4) Fais mon bicyclette.
Je fais de la bicyclette.

5) Oui.
Oui, je vais (très) vite.

6) Non non.
Non, je ne vais pas trop vite.

7) Fais le bicyclette?
Est-ce que c'est dangereux de faire de la bicyclette?
(Note: This is a question asked of the interviewer to clarify a preceding question. As such, it would probably not be scorable or even allowable on most tests.)

8) Un tout petit peu.
Oui, c'est un peu dangereux.

9) Non.
Non, je n'ai jamais eu d'accident.

etc.

Clearly not a very high score unless you are generous and give credit for comprehension. Most replies are simply oui, non, or another single word. Verbs are without a subj genders are wrong, etc. Nonetheless, the conversation is surprising in its relaxed, spontaneous nature (so different from the typical teacher-student interview!). It is entertaining, moreover, in its imaginative use of the French language and the insights it offers into a young American's first experiences with life in France. Judged by measures of communicative competence such as effort to communicate and amount of communication, our impression is thus somewhat different. Not bad at all, we might even concede, considering the range and rapidity of the questions in relation to the age and language experience of the child. It is apparent, furthermore, that it was Daniel's communicative rather than linguistic competence which prompted the remark

I heard frequently from neighbors and shopkeepers, "Qu'est-ce qu'il parle bien français, Daniel!"

It is not my intention here to provide an exhaustive analysis of the kinds of "errors" or strategies evidenced in the dialog transcribed above. To do so with confidence would require far more extensive data than is presently available on children's speech in French as both a first and second language. It is of interest, however, to attempt some tentative descriptions of the kinds of "errors" noted. The categories I have used below are those defined by Dulay and Burt.[4] Unlike these authors' careful adherence to language acquisition data in making observations about English as a second language, however, my assignments of an "error" to a particular category are, of necessity, extrapolative. Offered in a spirit of "consciousness raising," they have the virtue of compelling us to look at the "unlookable" and therein, perhaps, helping us to understand the learning and creativity they signal.

INTERFERENCE-LIKE ERRORS (French reflects an English usage)

oui (l. 22) - stress for emphasis rather than French mais oui or more appropriate in this instance, si; similarly vin (l. 52).

un franc et ten centimes (l. 23) - influence of English pronunciation of franc apparent; substitution of English ten for French dix; use of et corresponds to English one franc and ten centimes, not allowable in French.

pour dessert /dizɛr/ (l. 45) - influence of English pronunciation apparent: use of pour as in English for dessert rather than French comme.

des olives noires (l.45) - influence of English pronunciation apparent.

L1 DEVELOPMENTAL ERRORS (Do not reflect English usage but are likely to be made by children learning French as a first language)[5]

fais mon bicyclette (l. 4) - ommission of pronoun subject; cf. also prends des salades (l. 25), fais les commissions (l. 15), manger lapin (l. 41).

fais encore de ça (l. 56) - telescoped form of Je veux faire...; use of encore with a verb to indicate more or again.

elle vient manger (l. 41) - lack of tense inflection; cf. also manger lapin (l. 41), manger des diplomate (l. 49), qu'est-ce qu'il y a pour dessert? (l. 45).

moi pas aime le lapin (l. 41) - accusative for nominative pronoun (or emphatic nominative and omission of pronoun subject?); omission of ne.

gâteau quoi? (l. 48) - use of interrogative pronoun for interrogative adjective.

sais pas (l. 29; l. 46) - omission of ne; missing subject.

Christian Christian (l. 31) - missing conjunction.

Christian la...fait la bicyclette (a)vec moi (l. 35) - missing relative pronoun; similarly, le l'autre Christian aussi...elle s'appelle Chantal (l. 38).

le l'autre Christian (l. 38) - redundant addition of nonelided form of article.

AMBIGUOUS ERRORS (Can be categorized as either Interference-like Errors or L1 Developmental Errors)

vin (l. 52) - missing determiner; cf. also champagne (l. 54), lapin (l. 41).

mon bicyclette (l. 4) - inappropriate gender of determiner; similarly la bifteck hâché (l. 20)

des confiture (l. 19) - use of plural for singular partitive form; cf. also des pâté (l. 45), des diplomate (l. 49).

sept (l. 2) - omission of ans.

UNIQUE ERRORS (Do not reflect English usage and are not found in acquisition data of French as a first language)

le pain Christian (l. 33) - juxtaposition of nouns to show relationship.

*qué s'appelle? (l. 47) - for comment s'appelle?

Aside from the insights it offers into the provenance of "errors", the dialog also leads us to make other, more general speculations on second-language learning strategies. To the

extent that the foregoing exchange can be considered an authentic example of a beginning stage of second-language acquisition in a natural setting, it suggests strategies we might do well, perhaps, to not only expect but also reward in our classrooms. I have little doubt that with continued opportunity for self-expression, Daniel will develop his linguistic competence to the point where he could, if he desired, approximate the "acceptable" French model above. This seems a reasonable enough assumption, given the widespread observation of the ease with which children acquire a second language. His "errors" at this beginning stage provide us with some interesting clues as to the strategies of English-speaking children learning French as a second language. Rather than penalizing our students for similar use of such strategies, we should see them as a necessary phase of second-language acquisition and turn our attention, instead, to developing better measures of communicative competence.

One is struck by the wide range of comprehension as compared to the level of production. There was no concerted attempt on the part of the interviewer/mother to structure the exchange according to what the child might be able to say. Although she had some awareness of the kinds of experiences he had had, the interviewer could not know what linguistic expression these experiences would assume. The child nonetheless followed the conversation with relative ease. The exchange was for him no mere formalistic exercise; he was understanding, feeling and reacting, sometimes with discernable emotion, to what was being said. Note, for example, his irritation when asked if he didn't buy bread, to which he responds with emphasis oui (i.e. "Haven't you been paying attention? I just said so!" [l. 22]). Or, his careful insistence on the fact he did not like rabbit, "Pás aime le lapin" (l. 42). Further evidence of the child's level of comprehension and participation is his spontaneous contribution of additional information. When asked if he stopped by to see his grandmother and aunt when he ran the errands he answers, "Yes...and I pick up lettuce...and mail, too." (ll. 25-26).

Similarly, when asked who came to dinner, he replies, "Denise came to dinner. We had rabbit. I don't like rabbit." (l. 41).[6] Even when the responses are a short "yes," "no,' or "I don't know," they are without exception appropriate to the context, indicating a comprehension which far exceeds the ability to respond fully.[7]

Is it not a mistake, then, to look for complete sentences in the speech of beginning second-language learners? Would it not be preferable to encourage participation in a wide range of contexts and let fullness of response develop with increased experience? Insistence upon complete sentences may, in fact, be so unnatural as to actually discourage language development. It is interesting to note, further, that the length and intricacy of the responses increase as the conversation continues. Considerably more information is being volunteered by the time we reach the topic of Daniel's friends and the dinner party than in our earlier discussion of his activities in France. Short as this model is, we can therefore speculate that responses become more elaborate as the learner's experience increases, as he becomes more at ease in expressing himself within linguistic restrictions. It is noteworthy, for example, that in response to the question, "How old are you?" in the very beginning of the exchange, Daniel answers "sept" (l. 2), whereas much later, and without any intervening model, when asked how old Julie is, he answers "deux ans" (l. 65) and Catie, "trois ans" (l. 67).

One is struck, further, by the semantic richness of Daniel's French as contrasted with its structural simplicity. There are, as we have noted, few examples of structurally "acceptable" phrases in terms of standard adult French: pronoun subjects are absent, verbs lack inflection, ne...pas negation is represented as a simple pas before the verb, noun determiners are frequently absent or in the wrong gender or number. In short, there is an apparent inattention to those features we teachers of French usually emphasize in beginning lessons. There is, on the other hand, evidence of a rather wide range of vocabulary.[8] Names

for "things", in particular, seem to have caught his attention, as, for example, in the long string of substantives he supplies in response to questions about the kinds of errands he runs or what he had for dinner. He uses nouns creatively, moreover, to express relationships for which his French is otherwise not sufficiently sophisticated: "Le pain Christian" means "Christian, le fils du boulanger"; in "Christian Christian" two proper nouns are juxtaposed to indicate "Il y a deux Christian"; vin, with emphasis, means "Je l'ai déjà dit, du vin!" In other words, just as has been observed in first-language acquisition, a single substantive is frequently much more than just a name for something -- it may express a fully developed idea. This suggests that in our classrooms we should pay much more attention than we have to providing a semantically rich environment. We should give students words they ask for, words that have meaning for them.[9]

In all of these observations, there remains, of course, the question of the extent to which child acquisition of a second language can be compared to adult acquisition of a second language. There are differences, surely, just as there are differences in child acquisition patterns themselves, depending on the stage of cognitive development and first-language acquisition (not to mention socio-economic environment) of the child. Susan Ervin-Tripp has suggested, however, that in spite of the many obvious sources of difference "the components may be similar in gross outline."[10] But the point is, as she goes on to say, to study what these components consist of. The sample of second-language competence I have provided here will perhaps serve heuristically to encourage observation of beginning classroom French for what it is, not for what we would like it to be.[11] Increased observation and analysis will provide us with a surer sense of the strategies and stages involved in both child and adult second-language acquisition.

In the meantime, however, it is not outlandish to propose that the observations I have offered here on the French competence

of a young American boy, observations which in many instances are paralleled in studies of first-language acquisition, suggest ways in which we as teachers of French can increase the learning that goes on in our classrooms. To summarize, these are as follows: 1) We should provide for semantic richness in early stages, letting the student learn the labels for all the things he wants to know, rather than putting him off with talk of the importance of learning structures first, vocabulary later. 2) We should expect grammatical "errors" as the natural consequence of learning or exploring. Indeed, let us remember that "error" comes from the Latin errāre, to wander, from which we have the French verb errer. 3) We should provide for lots and lots of listening experiences, not expecting the student to be able to reproduce everything he understands but letting him respond as he is able. 4) Whatever we do, we must do it in a meaningful context that involves the feelings and concerns of our students.

I have described elsewhere the kinds of classroom situations and student-teacher relationships which seem to me to provide a maximum amount of meaningful interpersonal transactions in a foreign language.[12] Games, role-playing and, above all, use of French for classroom management and instruction, are ways we can provide our students with authentic opportunities for self-expression from the very first weeks of class. Most important, we must end where we begin -- with tests that measure progress toward an ability to successfully engage in situation-specific transactions, not context-devoid points of pronunciation and grammar. We must use tests that represent in one way or another a real-language activity, not ones contrived to, say, "test the subjunctive," etc. The interview I have recorded with my son is an example of one such transaction. A frankly subjective evaluation on a five-point scale in terms of effort and amount of communication would yield a more accurate measure of communicative competence than the kind of discrete-point test of oral production with which most of us are familiar.

But there are still better ways. What is wrong with the above interview, at least as a sole measure of communicative competence, is that it is a teacher-centered exchange, with the student in the role of information giver, responding to questions put to him. As such, it is but one kind of communicative context. A more comprehensive assessment of a person's ability to communicate in a second language would include situations where the student is, alternately, information getter, describer, reporter, etc. Take, as an example, the following test items:[13]

> I.A. Tell each student to pretend for a moment that he is an American visiting in Paris and that you are a policeman (agent de police) who, finding him at the scene of a street demonstration, has stopped him for questioning. Ask him to give you as best he can and without any interruption or assistance from you, the following information:
>
> 1) his name
> 2) where he is from
> 3) the name, 4) address and 5) occupation of the person he is visiting in Paris.
>
> After he has finished, write down what you have understood and tell the student to write down, in English, the five items of information he was trying to give you. Scoring: Compare notes. Give 2 points for each item of information you understood correctly.
>
> B. Reverse the procedure. This time the student plays an American policeman and the teacher a French visitor. The student tries to learn your name, address and occupation and the name, address and occupation of the person you are visiting.
>
> II. To make this activity more realistic and, frankly, more fun, test students in groups of three. You will need a quiet room away from any distractions.
>
> A. Have each student, in turn, give commands to one or both of the others. He scores 2 points for each different command correctly carried out in a time limit of 1 minute.
>
> B. Give the students 3 minutes for a group

> discussion to find out all they can about each other's courses: what courses they are taking, teachers' names, likes and dislikes, etc. You can be available as a reference person to provide the words and expressions they ask for, but you should not participate otherwise in the discussion. At the conclusion of the 3 minutes have each student write down in English all he has learned about the other two students. Score one point for each correct item of information noted.

...is, then, is the direction I feel we as a profession must take if ours is to remain a viable, alive concern in the years to come, preparing students for the real-life experiences that lie ahead of them. For those of you who say: "But what about proficiency tests, college entrance exams, problems of articulation?", I ask you to consider the following remarks (made in 1970) by William L. Higgins, U.S. Office of Education:

> ...the latest statistics which I have heard regarding the study of Latin--and this was some five years ago--put Latin in third place, after Spanish and French. Latin is chiefly maintained by institutional factors which are fast losing importance. One of the factors which will now help lay Latin to rest is the recent abandonment by the Catholic Church of Latin as an ineffective means of communication, even in a ceremonial context. As long as French and Spanish are being taught chiefly for institutional purposes--to fulfill college entrance or exit requirements--rather than for integrational purposes--to communicate with or to become a member of a non-English speaking community--then they too will follow Latin and Greek into a dead area in our educational system.[14]

If we are to reverse this trend, somebody has to begin somewhere, sometime. Why not us, here, and now?

FOOTNOTES

[1]Empirical evidence in support of the desirability of early practice in free expression can be found in Sandra J. Savignon, Communicative Competence: An Experiment in Foreign-Language Teaching (Philadelphia: Center for Curriculum Development, distributed by Rand McNally & Co., 1972). For further discussion of the implications of the above and other data, see Wilga M. Rivers, "Talking Off the Tops of their Heads" in TESOL Quarterly, 6 (1972), 71-81.

[2]For an overview of recent research and theoretical speculation in the area of first-language acquisition, see Dan I. Slobin, ed., The Ontogenesis of Grammar (New York: Academic Press, 1971), in particular, chapters by Susan Ervin-Tripp, "An Overview of Theories of Grammatical Development," and Martin Braine, "On Two Types of Models of the Internalization of Grammars."

[3]Heidi C. Dulay and Marina K. Burt, "Goofing: An Indicator of Children's Second Language Learning Strategies" in Language Learning, 22 (1972), 235-252, review the evidence in support of both a contrastive analysis hypothesis and an L1=L2 hypothesis, showing how both may be useful in categorizing the errors or "goofs" in second-language acquisition.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Observations of the acquisition of French as a first language (L1) by Paul Guillaume, "Le développement des éléments formels dans le langage de l'enfant," Journal de Psychologie, 24 (1927), 203-229, and "Les débuts de la phrase dans le langage de l'enfant," Journal de Psychologie, 24 (1927), 1-25, were useful to me in making the following assignments. Translations of both articles are included in Charles A. Ferguson and Dan I. Slobin, eds., Studies of Child Language Development (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973).

[6]These English equivalents are, of course, my interpretation of meaning, based on the context, rather than an attempt at verbatim translation.

[7]This is similar to an observation that has been made in first-language acquisition. Susan Ervin-Tripp has reported, "We know that, typically, recognition precedes production. We know that people can understand many more words than they ever use. The number of cues for recognition is less than the information needed for accurate production, and in recognition we can often profit from redundancy," "Imitation and Structural Changes in Children's Language," in E.H. Lenneberg, ed., New Directions in the Study of Language (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1964), 164.

[8]This parallels an observation made in first-language acquisition: "Evidence from child language favors the priority of lexical processing, since children for some years make little use of cues other than order and syntactic features of lexicon in grammatical processing." Ervin-Tripp, "Structure and Process in Language Acquisition," in James E. Alatis, ed., Bilingualism and Language Contact, Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics No. 23 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1970), 329.

[9]I have been impressed, in this connection, with the work of Sylvia Ashton-Warner, described in her book, Teacher (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963). In teaching New Zealand Maori children to read and write, she has them bring to the classroom words and expressions from their own experiences. These are the words they first learn to spell and then use in their personal compositions which later serve as beginning reading material for the other children in the class.

[10]Ervin-Tripp, in remarks following the presentation of her paper, "Structure and Process in Language Acquisition," op. cit., 349.

[11]One such attempt has been described by Patricia B. Powell, "Error Analysis and the Development of Communicative Competence," paper presented at the ACTFL Meeting, Boston, November 24, 1973.

[12]Sandra J. Savignon, "Other Peoples' Languages: A Game Everyone Can Play," paper delivered at the Indiana Foreign-Language Teachers' Association Fall Meeting, Indianapolis, November 2, 1972.

[13]These test items are from a series of tests of communicative competence being developed by the author to accompany a beginning high-school French program, Roger Coulombe et al., Voix et Visages de la France: Level I (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1974).

[14]William L. Higgins in remarks following a presentation by William F. Mackey, "Interference, Integration and the Synchronic Fallacy," at the 21st Annual Georgetown Round Table Meeting on Languages and Linguistics published in James E. Alatis, ed., Bilingualism and Language Contact, Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics No. 23 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1970), 226-227.